Department of Veterans Affairs | **Fact Sheet**

August 2004

Facts About the 1973 St. Louis Fire and Lost Records

The National Archives and Records Administration is the official depository for records of military personnel separated from the U. S. Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps and Coast Guard. The records are housed in three locations: the National Archives Building in Washington, D.C., the Washington National Records Center in Suitland, Md., and the National Personnel Records Center (NPRC) in St. Louis, Mo.

The NPRC in St. Louis contains records relating to:

- Army officers separated after June 30, 1917, and enlisted Army personnel separated after October 31, 1912.

- Air Force officers and enlisted personnel separated after September 1947.

- Naval officers separated after 1902, and naval enlisted personnel separated after 1885.

- Marine Corps officers separated after 1895, and enlisted personnel separated after 1904.

- Coast Guard officers separated after 1928, and enlisted personnel separated after 1914. Civilian employees of predecessor agencies (Revenue Cutter Service, Life-Saving Service and Lighthouse Service) of the Coast Guard from 1864-1919.

The Fire

A fire at the NPRC in St. Louis on July 12, 1973, destroyed about 80 percent of the records for Army personnel discharged between November 1, 1912, and January 1, 1960. About 75 percent of the records for Air Force personnel with surnames from "Hubbard" through "Z" discharged between September 25, 1947, and January 1, 1964, were also destroyed.

What Was Lost

It is hard to determine exactly what was lost in the fire, because:

- There were no indices to the blocks of records involved. The records were merely filed in alphabetical order for the following groups:

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World War I:	Army	November 1, 1912 - September 7, 1939
World War II:	Army	September 8, 1939 - December 31, 1946
Post World War II:	Army	January 1, 1947 - December 31, 1959
	Air Force	September 25, 1947 - December 31, 1963

Millions of records, especially medical records, had been withdrawn from all three groups and loaned to the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) before the fire. The fact that one's records are not in NPRC files at a particular time does not mean the records were destroyed in the fire.

Reconstruction of Lost Records

If veterans learn that their records may have been lost in the fire, they may send photocopies of any documents they possess -- especially separation documents -- to the NPRC. The address is National Personnel Records Center, Military Personnel Records, 9700 Page Blvd., St. Louis, MO 63132-5100. The NPRC will add those documents to the computerized index and file them permanently.

Alternate Sources of Military Service Data

When veterans don't have copies of their military records and their NPRC files may have been lost in the St. Louis fire, essential information about their military service may be available from a number of other sources.

- The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) maintains records on veterans whose military records were affected by the fire if the veteran or a beneficiary filed a claim before July 1973.

- Service information may also be found in various kinds of "organizational" records such as unit morning reports, payrolls and military orders on file at the NPRC or other National Archives and Records Administration facilities.

- There also is a great deal of information available in records of the State Adjutants General, and other state "veterans services" offices.

By using alternate sources, NPRC often can reconstruct a veteran's beginning and ending dates of active service, the character of service, rank, time lost on active duty, and periods of hospitalization. NPRC can issue NA Form 13038, "Certification of Military Service," considered the equivalent of a Form DD-214, "Report of Separation From Active Duty," to use in establishing eligibility for veterans benefits.

Necessary Information for File Reconstruction

The key to reconstructing military data is to give the NPRC enough specific information so the staff can properly search the various sources. The following information is normally required:

- Full name used during military service
- Branch of service
- Approximate dates of service
- Service number or Social Security number
- Place of entry into service
- Last unit of assignment
- Place of discharge

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